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# Growing Pains: The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly

Sarah Porter-Liddell

*Eastern Illinois University*

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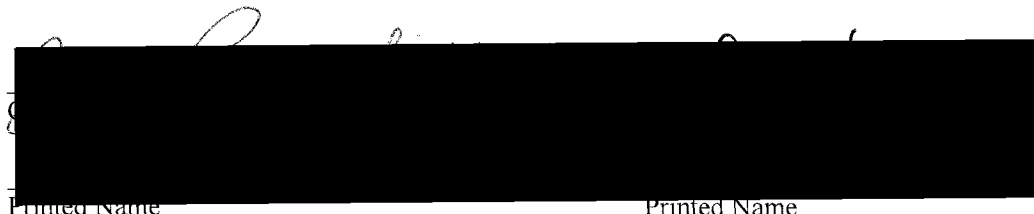
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GROWING PAINS:

The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly

(TITLE)

BY

Sarah Porter-Liddell

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2015

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## *Abstract*

This thesis includes a collection of Slam and performance poems that examine issues of race, sexuality, religion, family, and life choices; including a critical introduction briefly explaining the oral roots of slam and performance poetry in which I relate the work of contemporary poets such as Alix Olson and Hattie Gossett to my own work, while explaining the effects of reading the work of contemporary poets in anthologies such as *ALoud: Voices of the Nuyorican Café*, and how my poetry develops through the language of the poets included in these anthologies.

*I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my lord and savior Jesus Christ because nothing would be possible without him. I'd also like to dedicate this thesis to my partner Jeffery McCoy because he inspires me to keep moving forward. And finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family: The Liddell, McCoy, and Porter's because family will continuously inspire my work.*

I'd like to acknowledge Dr. Olga Abella, Dr. Ruben Quesada, and Dr. Robert Martinez. They are three extraordinary professors and I am truly thankful and honored to have had them as a thesis committee.

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## *Introduction*

In its earliest production, poetry was an oral form of expression. Poetry's different vocalizations allowed it to be used across the world to express societal beliefs, tell stories, and preserve liturgies as well as pass on the histories of many people. As poetry became written, however, it began to shift away from the folk song type of tradition of preliterate societies and began developing into something that could be studied. Perhaps Aristotle's *Poetics* can be blamed for the initiation of a more academic approach to poetry that continues to preoccupy institutions of higher learning, although poetry's admittance into academia did not occur until the Twentieth Century.

Bart Baxter argues in his article "Does Poetry Matter: The Culture of Poetry" that "before the turn of the century, few poets were working in colleges...Poets were doctors like Williams, business men like Stevens [...] farmers or bankers like Eliot and Frost [...]." Then poets became professors, began earning a living, directing theses on poetry, and as W.H. Auden said in 1932, "today, writing gets shut up in a circle of clever people writing about themselves for themselves" (Izzo 24). Poetry evolved into a realm that only included academics and excluded its origin of folk song and tale, considering performance or story-like poetry less academic.

In the late Twentieth Century, however, poets began reclaiming the oral tradition of poetry, taking their poems to the people with performances at local YMCA's and cafés. But poetry as it was first performed, as song, became popular in the 70's among black youth in New York with the advent of Rapping. In her online article on *BBC*, "40 Years On From the Party Where Hip Hop Was Born," Rebecca Laurence writes,

On a hot August night in 1973, Clive Campbell, known as DJ Kool Herc, and his sister Cindy put on a 'back to school jam' in the recreation room of their

apartment block at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the west Bronx. [...]The legend is a simple one – but the factors leading to the creation of a hip hop culture were a fusion of social, musical and political influences as diverse and complex as the sound itself.

From this party in the Bronx rose a movement that turned poetry back into the spoken word. Laurence quotes Marcyliena Morgan, a professor of African-American Studies at Harvard, as saying, “Hip hoppers literally mapped onto the consciousness of the world a place and an identity for themselves as the originators of an exciting new art form.” This notion of mapping the world and creating a new art form is discussed in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* by Imani Perry, where she explains the role of the artist in hip hop, and how, in many ways, hip hop is an oral art form.

“In hip-hop tactical shifts occur within the style of metaphor, which is highly variable even within one song, as well as in the distinctive style an artist might have as an individual, or if he or she is part of a group, within the group. Hip hop music is a war of position, and the position one takes manifests itself in the performance or language” (59).

In other words, the work of the artist becomes a performance of their political message.

In the 90’s poetry as performance emerged more fully and forcefully in the artistic form of Slam poetry. In *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America*, Susan B.A. Somers-Willett explains that “far from harkening back to poetry’s preliterate origins in which the boundaries of authorship were muddled by oral transmission, slam poetry puts exceptional emphasis on the role of the author and his or her

identity” (Somers-Willett 17). Essentially, at the end of the Twentieth Century, poetry became an avenue of voice for the people— by the people— a means of politicizing the self. An example of this is Evie Shockley’s—a contemporary poet from Winston-Salem— poem “The N-Word,” found in the anthology *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*. The poem is about her being called “nigger” by a white boy, and what that meant to her and the world as she understood it. She writes,

I want to write a poem  
 about how this little white boy said it:  
 wasn’t even talking to me:  
 told his father wait—  
 i wanna play on the pinball machine  
 soon as the \_\_\_\_\_ gets through with it [...]  
 and i still can’t say the word:  
 it’s busy  
 busy, you hear me,  
 all tied up with quentin tarantino  
 and I wouldn’t want to disturb it

(Medina and Rivera 25).

Shockley discusses a subject that is both familiar and foreign to her, familiar because she knows that people call African-Americans the n-word, but the word is so foreign from the way she sees herself that she cannot even utter it. It belongs somewhere else away from her, in the violence of a Tarantino film. This confusion and discomfort with the “n-word” is projected throughout her

poem, forcing listeners to experience with her the pain of being treated as someone of lesser value, of being seen as a “nigger” rather than as another human being. Instead of keeping the word as something outside of herself, however, Shockley claims it, to disempower those who use it to define her:

black folks got their mouths around it, chewing, swallowing, regurgitating  
 chewing, swallowing, regurgitating,  
 chewing, swallowing again, re-  
 defining it

Still, in the end she exclaims, “I *won’t* use the word,” because she is busy “deeply involved in self-definition/ and world reconstruction.” In other words, she is “*busy*” being a human being.

The poet Alix Olson also turns the personal political in her poem “Cunt Cuntry,” where she celebrates her vagina and all the pleasures it provides. While Shockley refuses to use the “n-word,” Olson takes the word used to marginalize her and redefines it so that using the word becomes an act of empowerment. She announces at the beginning of her poem, “I’ve decided to start/ Cunt Cuntry!” She then threatens, “The Cunts are coming: It’s the Cunt Revolution!” (Olson). Olson describes herself on her web page as a “spoken word artist-activist.” Even though Olson speaks her poems, her poems are actually referred to as songs, and as her web page says, she “was voted OutMusician of the Year” (OutMusic).

Marc Smith (also known as Slam Papi), the creator of Slam poetry, states that “The performance of poetry is an art—just as much an art as the art of writing it.” He also adds, “NO audience should be thought of as obligated to listen to the poet...It is the poet’s obligation to compel the audience to listen” (Smith ).

In my collection of slam and performance poems entitled, “Growing Pains: The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly,” I discuss my experiences with coming of age in an urban city, attending a predominately white institution in a rural community, and my struggles with sexuality, religion, race, prostitution, strippers, and family. Because the art of slam poetry relies on both the written aspect of the poem as well as the style of the delivery, paying close attention to how my poems work both on the page and in performance is key. The issues that concern me are similar to those voiced by poets such as Shockley and Olson, this makes my poems give voice to some of the same personal angsts, but they are centered on my personal experiences. My voice is much more confrontational than Shockley’s, and just as political as Olson’s. For example, my poem “The State of Black Men,” deals with an issue similar to that raised by Olson’s poem “Cunt Cuntry.” In her poem, Olson deals with the way women are stereotyped and dehumanized,

I'd cut through my panties, I'd shake my pube hair loose,  
 I'd sign my Jane HanCunt in cursive with Cunt juice.  
 I'd declare the Independence of Clitoris to Shining Clitoris,  
 Proclaim the Emancipation of all Cunts—

My voice is just as “in your face” as Olson’s, for example, in my poem “The State of Black Men”

I want to see black men do  
 manly shit; like play pool, drink beer,  
 masturbate, even work. I watch “Martin,”  
 cuss, yell, and scream in a wig, tight dress  
 and a big fake ass. “The Fresh Prince” shake  
 his firm ass, snap his fingers, and roll

his neck, while Uncle Phil pretends  
to like women,

In this poem I strive to write about my feelings regarding African-American men, specifically comedians, who have worn dresses for fame. I comment on a few particular instances in which black male comedians pretend to be fat black women, and how these men, emasculated and feminized, are becoming the face of the African-American male presence on television.

My poems are meant to be read aloud so the audience can hear the sound and rhythm of my poems clearly. I was deeply influenced in this regard by many contemporary poets in the anthology of poetry entitled *ALOUD: Voices of the Nuyorican Café*. Each of the poets in this collection is meant to be read aloud; they demand to be heard and not just simply read. One particular poet, Hattie Gossett, resonates for me from the others. She uses no punctuation and a very strict and unusual written formation in her poems. She writes about what it means to be a black woman, and about black women's issues. Her poem "Pussy and Cash" speaks about the power of the vagina and its relation to the world and its economy. Her language pulls me in because it is strong, blunt, and she uses imagery that makes her voice loud. "Of course theres an endless pull of pussys on reserve waiting for you to/ bring them in/ to run yo household take care of yo kids or grandma or run yo business/"(Algarin, Miguel, and Holman 12). Similarly, in *The Spoken Word Revolution (slam, hip-hop & the poetry of a new generation)*, Kent Foreman uses blunt language, minimal punctuation, and form as an extension of punctuation in his poem "Chicago." He writes,

Because I'm a patriot, I love this bitch  
You dig?  
This sprawling, bawdy breathtaking witch

This pig,

Sometimes

She has her moods

So stoically endured by her black bastards

She broods

Sometimes

She's lonely (Eleveld and Smith 16)

Reading Gossett and Foreman made me realize my own poetry was vague. My poems lacked imagery and I was challenged to think more about delivery, as well as the way my poems worked as a written art form. I also developed an interest in the role of punctuation, and how it operates as a form of control within the poem. So, I began to exclude punctuation in some of my poems, in an attempt to grasp Gossett and Foreman's technique of imagery and sound, such as in my poem "Derek's Understanding."

I don't know if her ass

or her skirt

on her ass

made me feel

hard

Her brown skin I love

that shit

It's comfortable

relaxing,  
makes my hard dick happy  
happy to be hard

Gossett and Foreman gave me an understanding of imagery and language, and how they work with sound and performance. Overall, my collection of poems work at grasping this understanding: every enjambment, line length, and word choice conveys meaning and intent through a voice that yearns to be heard in order to inspire change.



I.

The Good

2

I Can't Find My Shoes

I.

Her black leather flat wide  
with the thick sole sinking under  
the left heel, looks strange to me.  
Red dirt brushes black socks  
squeezing around her fat dark ankles.  
A Southern bell, hidden  
within city smog, eats watermelon  
and pigs feet. She stares  
at the Chicago skyline, remembers Itta Bena  
country roads, fresh chickens, fat cows,  
her home. Inside the flat's warm with thoughts  
of hot Mississippi sun and perspiration residue.  
This isn't my shoe. My mother's a lost country  
girl walking uneven pavements.

I Can't Find My Shoes

II.

My grandmother's thin fingers  
polish real patent leather  
dress shoes;

she crouches in a circle  
on a split polished wood floor  
she shines on her hand and knees.

She warms fresh green beans and white  
potatoes, dusts silver dishes, and African art  
straight from the motherland.

Her pristine pots hang untouched,  
her old furniture wrapped tight in plastic,  
and white carpet unblemished.

Her "Kings English" raises eye brows  
on white women staring at her polished black family,  
in their all white neighborhood.

Her patent leather shoes,  
I don't try them on. I can't fill them.

My Grandparents' Love

I.

Fifty-seven years in  
my grandfather's belly brushes  
the edge of the round wooden  
dining room table.

He mixes Splenda  
in light coffee, and complains  
my grandmother cooks too slow,  
but he washes the dishes  
after every meal.

He tells my grandmother  
she's beautiful, remembers  
her walking a cow  
down a dusty Mississippi road  
and how he knew then  
that she was his wife.

II.

My grandmother's fingers still  
press into soft pie crust,  
cut and mash fresh sweet potatoes,  
melt butter and add cinnamon  
to the best Southern sweet potato pie.

She mixes Splenda  
in dark coffee, and eats  
grated carrots on a bed of lettuce  
while my grandfather laughs  
at sports on the television.

She remembers my grandfather  
wiping sweat from his forehead  
under a large brown hat  
winking at her and her cow,  
and how she knew then  
that he was her husband.

III.

Together they kiss and hug  
their four children.  
Attend a MB church service  
every Sunday. Then pray  
for their family.

They bicker over television shows,  
remote controller control,  
and laundry days.

But their warm house  
filled with smells of sugar  
clean linen, and Estee Lauder  
reminds me that love can exist  
beyond lust and youth.

Return

The scent of warm rain  
brushes our room.  
You roll over, stare at me  
with your back facing the morning.  
Streaks of purple, red  
and burnt orange cover  
your back, make lines  
across your soft cheeks,  
and slightly blur the brown  
of your eyes. I know  
your warm hand

that cups my left breast  
will leave. You'll roll over,  
stare into the coming day,  
kiss my forehead, shower  
and leave. Alone, I'll stare  
through the window, thinking  
of you coming home.

I know your day  
will be long. Your boss, Jim,  
will yell loud, drop papers,  
and tell you to get coffee  
before your day ends.  
But I'll be happy,

remembering that your  
brown coarse hair brushing my chin,  
your lips against mine.  
I blink. Wipe the sleep from my eyes,  
walk to the window,  
stare into purple, red,  
and burnt orange, reminded  
that night will bring your return.

## Night Owl

Heavy eyelids close  
when I realize my room is dark.  
The day's broken,  
blackness takes charge,  
allows my mind to wander  
into places I know well.  
And all I want is to fly.

Tree-branch shadows  
turn into witches with long noses.  
Their feet wiggle  
underneath small houses, fit for Hansel  
and Gretel to eat candy forever.

Dorothy clicks her red heels,  
but never makes it home,  
cuz' I want to know  
where her shoes came from.

The cow jumping  
over the moon. Lands in my room  
with milk and chocolate-chip cookies.  
My favorite. Unlimited one-dollar bills  
fall to my bedroom floor,  
that old Tooth Fairy: Silly woman.  
I still have all my teeth.

Barbie becomes my best friend.  
We talk about that weird guy  
who sits behind me in math class,  
touches my hair, sniffs his fingers,  
and inhales large breaths  
to remember my scent.

But daylight blinds the magic,  
destroys illusion. Sun beams  
changes my hair to a short bob cut,  
disturbed by hair oil and humidity.  
My wings collapse in my back, and it's  
back to the nasty lunch sandwiches,  
and white milk.

II.

The Nasty



You Only Live Once

Your Smirnoff bottle lies flat,  
spilling near your head,  
dreams of a wet Saturday.

Vomit by your mouth  
soils the carpet. Chunks  
of tortilla chips, red salsa,  
weed brownies, spread  
on your shirt.

You remember  
    two girls,  
Heather and Amy,  
    you think  
followed you home.

Their tight skirts,  
the light beer  
on their breath,  
they staggered  
to your empty room,  
    remind you of a night  
        in high school,  
            three girls;  
            one took plan B,  
                the next morning.

You search for the condom,  
lost in tussled sheets,  
    messy hair  
        and morning breath.  
Note by your lamp:  
                    # YOLO.

Reggie

Skyway 8 reminds me  
you crazy bitch. Reminds me  
reminds me, reminds me  
reminds me with my memory still—  
focused on purple rain dripping  
by the window.

Red, gray, blue—I remind you,  
blow black, purp-ple, blue, blow  
back, blow back, back blow  
this loud, I blow Reginald—  
I blow green, in between minutes  
broken minutes, lonely  
minutes. Timeless. Reginald.

You crazy bitch,  
hand me my purse, my coat, my food.  
Remember the twenty dollars you lost,  
I owe you—and for fifteen minutes  
with Reginald, client two—he always pays  
for two shows. Put on red, gray, blue--  
blow on pink pale parts, wrinkled  
skin folded with nasty pubes. Greasy  
skin soiled with sweet sweat, sipping  
cheap gin staggers over one memory  
too many times, same room,  
different women. They all remember.

*I do.*

*Black, purple, blue marks  
all around my eye. Fat lips lick  
stiff neck lines lying fast  
on a brown nasty gray bed. Rest  
peace-full-me on semen. See  
men don't respect the profession,  
confess-on me what their women,  
mothers, lovers, won't do. I do  
remember Reginald, rough nasty plus  
nasty, tough--- nasty, nasty, nasty  
dreams abused. I'm use-d to  
that.*

He likes red, gray, blue—  
panties bras, hats—yesterday's pussy  
stench clings with funky residue.  
Do you remember lonely nights

in Skyway 8?  
Simple Answer

Simply put, he stresses  
you out. Takes control  
over everything. Makes messes,  
clings constantly; a filthy strong hold.

Greasy brow raised high,  
he questions every moment.  
Stay clear of that  
fat evil man. That shy  
evil grin. That cat  
daddy. Tell Billy bye.

Getting Money

Her lips pucker tight  
and dry. Her eyes  
closed, she breathes heavy

while withered, tired hands attempt  
to caress her back  
beneath her bra strap.

Grown men blow kisses  
to her thick lips, tickled with light liquor.  
Their lustful stares

stare blindly at her bold breast  
wide hips. Their pants grow  
thick, they grip and imagine

the sweet taste of their sweat  
dripping off her hard nipple.  
Looking at the ceiling fan spin

above her, she pushes  
a limp man aside. She doesn't know  
his name, doesn't remember his price;

never forgets his touch.  
Walking Halsted alone  
she remembers her dreams,

then forgets them.  
She's taught herself  
reality pays bills.

## Empty Money

Diamond Star gripped a red bra  
holding triple A titties  
in my face. Grabbed a dollar  
from my fiancé's mouth,  
and shook her small ass on a pole  
larger than her body.

I grabbed a glass of water,  
pretended I was drinking,  
and listened to grown men groan.  
Grab their semi-hard dicks, tug,  
and flick their tongues at Diamond's  
kiddie frame, mix-matched bra  
and panties, with long white tube  
socks with red bows, as she danced  
towards the middle of the stage.

She moved fast to country  
music, and wiggled her back  
to "dem strippers."  
She stepped hard  
across a wood floor,  
in plastic heels. Confident,  
she bit her lips, and removed  
her bra. The light shined on her  
eyes. Empty, she stared,  
at empty front row seats.

"where you guys from?"  
I stared at Diamond. Her thin  
lips, her makeup  
smeared, her hair damp, in lose  
wavy curls. I sniffed the air,  
at least she didn't stink.  
"Chicago, huh? Never been.  
Never been nowhere,  
nowhere but Neoga."

Diamond walked away.  
She turned, looked back,  
and smiled. Her song ended.  
She held a single  
dollar, tightly clutched,  
and waved bye.

You Thought You Walked For Virginitv

*Haibun*

You stand on my porch, staring at me through the window. Sweat soaks your chest, glistens on coils of brown hair shaped like tiny puff balls. Your soiled tank-top sticks tight around your round stomach. A wet ring circles your nipples and armpits. Your hair clingy with perspiration, and the skin on your pink lips peel in the hot summer heat. You wipe your sweaty hands across your sweaty face, smile at me, and ask to come inside. The cool air from my apartment hardens your nipples. You move close to me, smelling salty and sweet.

fifty blocks you walked  
to prove my virginity  
was what you most wanted.

III.

The Ugly

### I Can't Help

I yell "wikkity-wik-wik-wee-uu,"  
and my dogs come running.  
They jump, leap, and lick  
my face like they haven't seen me  
in years.

Their tails whip the air,  
smack my legs, and leave  
red marks on my brown skin,  
reminders that they love me.

Their red tongues run  
across their sharp teeth,  
their stomachs growling.  
Long droopy eyes stare  
at an empty Purina bag.

The clothes in my closet  
barely hanging, fall in a pile  
next to a full laundry basket.

My fridge bare and cold  
buzzes loud, making my stomach  
growl.

My cabinet door swings  
open, a can of evaporated milk  
peaks from behind green peas.

My hands shake  
when I rub the tops of my dogs  
heads. These large mouths,  
wide eyes and pink noses  
depend on me.

And even though I want to,  
even though I need to,  
I can't feed them now.



## High School

Week day evenings we fill the number 4  
Cottage Grove bus seats  
with foul language, sunflower  
seed shells, now and later  
wrappers, and hot bodies.  
While 9-5's stand, frown  
and complain about our fights, loud  
talking, and cellphone speakers playing  
"Say Yes" until every girl is wet  
with young anticipation.

We wait hot or cold on 49<sup>th</sup>  
at 7:45 am for security to search  
book bags, bodies, and back pockets.  
The metal detector buzz  
clings to a cellphone battery  
tucked in a sock or underwear.

We fight in school hallways,  
eat nachos at lunch,  
skip class to do nothing.  
Walk by 51<sup>st</sup> street projects,  
the smell of piss sinking deep,  
then laugh and cry at our homeless  
project families forced  
to live in group homes  
after they destroyed 51<sup>st</sup> street  
projects.

We play spades  
behind abandoned buildings,  
stare at 47<sup>th</sup> covered in cardboard,  
gang signs, and open crack houses,  
then pretend we understand  
who we are.

The cool kids  
wear gold chains, air force  
ones and stolen Jordans.  
The nerds read Wright, wish  
on Whitman, and hide  
in bathrooms from bullies  
who cry because they're lonely.

Our teachers teach life like  
it is a necessity. Teach us  
we need to survive, by any means.  
We steal money  
to ride trains, then watch  
our siblings, pretend  
to be parents,  
have sex like adults,  
without worry.  
Without question.  
But we beg  
for attention, love, understanding  
or communication. We never  
trust. We never  
fear.

We walk alone at midnight,  
sneak in R-rated movies,  
steal food from Arabics,  
write graffiti on Chicago  
transit. Laugh at our violence.  
Love in private, cry in silence,

wait hot or cold  
at 7:45 am for security to search  
book bags, bodies, and back pockets,  
for the metal detector  
to buzz on a cellphone battery  
tucked in a sock or underwear,  
for hot meals, real  
meals, talk to real friends,  
escape our poor projects,  
learn life from teachers,  
and pray that we finish,  
hope that we make it alive  
to graduate.

## Preparing for Marriage

### I.

Thirty-seven years  
of marriage in the drain  
and my father still calls  
my mother fat.

My mother still cries  
in the bathroom. Prays  
to God for my father's  
salvation, and begs Jesus  
to make her family whole.

### II.

Newly wed friends just brushing  
a year argue over money,  
love and lies. The husband plays  
video games to relieve stress.  
The wife is lonely; begs  
for friends, needs attention.

They pray each evening,  
read The Bible every morning  
and eat dinner silently.

### III.

My fiancée ignores me  
when I'm angry. Yells  
when he's frustrated,  
masturbates when he's lonely  
and buys me gifts at random.

He waits,  
for July twenty-fifth  
of twenty-fifteen.  
The day he can fuck me,  
without having to repent.

## Church

Little brown girls sit  
in the first church pew,  
close to the altar.  
Their faces shine  
with Vaseline rubbed deep  
into their copper skin,  
and woolly hair—  
smells of hot iron resting  
on a gas stove sizzling  
close to small necks.

Their white dresses pressed  
stiff, white dress socks  
with wide lace rims hug  
their small crossed ankles.  
They fold their tiny gloved  
fingers, pretend to understand  
the “word,” clap and imitate  
the cries of dancing sinners  
on the pulpit.

They leave,  
watch their praying mothers  
suck dick, fight, and drink.

They hide,  
from abusive fathers  
clutching the bible  
to their chests.

They sit, adult women  
fingering the anticipation  
of hot kisses and forbidden  
bathroom sex with a deacon

and the pastor’s nurse,  
who sits left of the pastor  
all in white.

Watching White Boys

I talk too fast

right?

So I dig my thick fingers  
past my big brown coils  
and scratch my dry scalp.

Those red faces

look angry.

Biting their lips,  
smiling uncomfortably,  
and blinking

real hard  
and real fast.

They keep looking at me.

The tone of their voices  
call me dumb  
illiterate  
un-academic  
and ghetto.

I look too dark

right?

So I wear bright colors  
like green, pink, or yellow  
tee-shirts and pants.

So you notice me.

Maybe you'll actually  
agree with me,  
on something,  
anything.

But that stiff body language

looks unaccepting.

You don't believe I belong;  
that's clear.

And you just can't stomach  
that I might say something  
important.

And *that*,

white boys,  
makes *you* sick to your stomach  
right?

## In Court Against My Landlord

The moment I walked in  
I knew you hated me.  
Your face flushed red, your tight  
white lips pinched dry, rubbed  
slowly against your front teeth.  
Your body rigid  
against a straight wooden  
chair. Arms folded,  
fingers crossed, eyes focused  
on my nose, pretending  
to look me in the eyes.

I saw a white man,  
a white man that hated,  
a white man that hated me.  
You saw a black girl,  
who lives in your complex,  
uninvited, and her fiancée  
staring you directly in the eyes,  
dare you to lie;  
lie before the judge and witnesses  
that she owed you. That she  
was indebted to you. And somehow

the brittle bite to your jaw  
and the tremble in your voice  
reminded me I was indebted  
to you. The scratch  
in your throat, the coldness  
in your body language,  
and the confidence in your lies,  
reminded me that your whiteness  
your privilege  
and your maleness  
indebted me.  
I felt I owed you.

# Lazy Bitch

I can't stand a lazy bitch.

A welfare dependent,  
     government assistance, financial  
         aid refund for a living, broke off  
     weave, weed, and nails, fake  
 credit cards, fraud, scheming bitch.  
 I can           not stand.

A dumb bitch,  
 talking dumb shit. Begging bitch,  
 asking for child support and WIC  
     bitch,  
 A never working, always complaining,  
     never trying, always arguing, simple  
 bitch.

I cannot. Stand.

A lazy bitch.

A loyal side chick, faithful  
 to another woman's man, a leaching  
     bitch, will suck you dry  
         for every penny  
             a gold-digging bitch.  
 A "but'chu ain't,  
 you don't  
 you can't,"  
     nagging bitch.  
 I  
     can not  
                     stand.

A lazy bitch,  
 is a specific bitch.

Some of us know her,  
     some of us have seen her.  
 Walking stank past the drug store,  
 holding a knock-off,  
     wearing cheap heels,  
         short shorts, and a s/medium  
         tank-top  
                     in winter.

She works real hard  
     to get a man, a thirsty bitch.  
 She gambles all day,  
     fucks all night,  
         forgets her kids,

I cannot stand.

a tricking bitch.

Lazy bitches are forceful.  
     They sneak into your families,  
         live their lives watching,  
 and preying on your success.  
 They stay content  
 doing  
     and being  
 nothing.  
     They work hard  
         at not working at all.



## The State of Black Men

I want to see black men do  
manly shit; like play pool, drink beer,  
masturbate, even work. I watch "Martin,"  
cuss, yell, and scream in a wig, tight dress  
and a big fake ass. "The Fresh Prince" shake  
his firm ass, snap his fingers, and roll  
his neck, while Uncle Phil pretends  
to like women, and Eddie Murphy's thick  
lips, fat body, and loud mouth yells  
at "Norbit." These men are doing shit.  
Womanly shit. They are fat, loud, black  
women. I should have known black  
men don't do shit, don't exist  
not on our televisions.

## To My Rapist

You touch me; like  
you want me,  
like you want this  
to be memorable.  
Like love. Rough hands  
slide across my back,  
scrape my skin. A sticky  
wet tongue, on my neck,  
hot breath on my ear.  
Your body,

behind me.  
Crown Royal leaking  
through your pores—stench  
like old gasoline—heavy.  
You smile, knowing I'd  
bury my face into a pillow,  
then cry.

Swelling inside. You spill  
stories of your past; previous  
lovers, lies, envious women  
who wish they were “lucky”  
enough to have you  
between their thighs  
cooing, moaning, whispering  
things they won't remember.

I grab the bed post,  
dig into the white sheets,  
stained with my blood,  
search for a way out,  
to be rescued  
from my stolen virginity.

You finish,  
stand and smile at my body  
drenched with your sweat.  
You look back,

at tear stains lining my face,  
your cum on my cheek.  
You grab your clothes,  
then leave.

Derek's Understanding

I don't know if it was her ass

or the skirt

tight on her ass

that made me feel

hard.

Maybe,

her brown skin,

I love that shit.

It's comfortable,

relaxing,

makes my hard dick happy.

Happy to be hard

On Fleek

That young nigga pants was hangin'  
low underneath his ass. Asked'm  
"nigga, you gay?" He said "nah."  
I said "nah? Nah? What is that? You  
ain't gay? Pull ya paints up then fool."  
That nigga turned around. Twisted  
his lips and licked his fingers.  
He was eating them Hot Cheetos.  
8 in the damn morning, drinkin'  
a "Hugs" juice.

I stood up out my porch chair,  
walked close to the steps rail  
and that nigga stuck his hand  
in his jacket, started pullin'  
something out.  
I dropped my sandwich,  
threw my hands up, like "nigga,  
you gon' shoot? Gon' shoot.  
I'm ready to die."  
He pulled out a Suzie Q,  
unwrapped it, and ate it.  
Ate like he missed dinner,  
for a week.

"What is nah?" I say.  
He swallowed the Q. Took a sip  
of that nasty sugar juice. Licked  
them brown fingers. Rubbed  
his other hand through his fro,  
looking nervous. "Shidd,  
I'on know, old man." I stepped  
off my porch, closer to that boy.  
Look'm dead in his dirty face.  
His tired eyes. "Eyes too young.  
Too young to be tired."

Then asked'm if he was hungry.  
That nigga shook his nappy head;  
prideful. Said "Man nigga,  
I'm on fleek." He turned away  
and walked to the bus stop.

I waited till the bus got close,  
walked me and my sandwich  
to the stop. I dropped that sandwich,

right next to'em. He looked down,  
grabbed the sandwich, then nodded.  
Whatever on fleek was,  
that nigga didn't have it.

## Looking for Better

I looked on Youtube  
and black women were huggin'  
white men and black men  
were complainin'. Talkin'  
bout "look! see there! black  
women datin' white men  
act completely different  
than the normal black girl.  
They submissive to they man."

I thought I would respond  
to that Youtube video,  
until I read a Yik Yak post  
talkin' about "all lives matter  
it's 2015, black people  
need to stop acting  
like they are victims."

I felt overwhelmed.  
Listenin' to a recording  
of an unnamed Indian man  
tellin' the world "black women  
aren't important, the least  
desirable of all races,  
the laziest of all people."

I searched Google  
for something inspiring,  
something uplifting. Then I saw  
her. Michelle Obama. Holdin'  
up her right fist, smilin',  
yellin' "Black Girls Rock."

(In remembrance of) Percy Day

Staring at you lying still,  
without life,  
made my walls of armor  
break. You always said "Sarah,  
you strong as hell." I  
don't see that now.

Your casket swallows you  
whole. Your head, sinks  
into a plush pillow. Your pale chin  
buried into your chest.

Your eyes closed, breaking the  
glances we shared. The gloss,  
and hazel that reflected  
dreams of having a wife,  
and children. Seventeen when shot,  
you just wanted to graduate high  
school.

You were proving to everyone,  
and me, that you weren't "the kid  
off the block," slanging, dreaming,  
and stepping away from a future.

Always writing; always rapping  
about everything you loved  
or hated. Fear of your son  
to be. Being a dad.

You'd listen  
when no one else would.  
Your ears strong, your eyes  
magnified, by the innocence you  
lost in your youth.

*You were supposed to be here,*  
  
with me.



I matter

You stare at me like  
my life doesn't matter, but  
#BlackLivesDoMatter.

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